

# critical digest

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September 1, 1952

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

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## Fall Drama Prospects

The Millionairess-Shubert, 10/9/52. Theatre Guild presents for ten weeks limited run Katharine Hepburn in comedy of George Bernard Shaw. Members of current London cast which will repeat parts in New York include Cyril Ritchard and Robert Helpmann. Directed by Michael Bentham.

## Summer Tryouts

Jezebel's Husband, Robert Nathan's comedy which Claude Rains is touring the summer circuit with, must define its line between comedy and tragedy more distinctly, recommends Taylor, Billboard, who viewed production at Framingham, Mass. Acting could hardly be improved upon, production is adult entertainment...Comin' Thro' the Rye, musical on Robert Burns by late Warren Munsell, Jr, produced at Olney, Md, is a sound idea plus good writing that requires speeding up for Broadway, rates Lowe, Variety. David Brooks heads fine cast...That Foolish Age, new comedy by Charlotte Buchwald Harmon debuted at Clinton, Conn, might make a fair film, but is weak for Broadway, comments Bone, Variety...Genesis 1952, drama by George Crockford presented at Milford, Conn, which will be shown at Yale Drama Department in mid-October, is a fine first play that could be made a winner with the help of a smart technician, tips Burn, Variety. Plot of three character play concerns playwright's efforts to mold character he created ten years before.

## Strawhat Visits

New managers of Woodstock, NY, Playhouse, Abe Sainer and William Weisman, are in good health, good spirits and hope to put their theatre in black by end of next season, Rice, Post, was informed. Special bus rides from nearby villages are offered during week, while they have avoided "arty" plays for the art colony...Summer theatre trend of patrons choosing plays rather than attending weekly, noted by Richard Aldrich, who runs three Cape Cod, Mass, playhouses to Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun... After a tour of New England summer theatres Coleman, Mirror, urges talent scouts to check 50 youngsters who tour Cape Cod area. They call themselves the Highfield Players and operate from Falmouth, Mass.

## Hits Revisited

The Moon is Blue, West Coast company starring Diana Lynn and David Niven, highly praised by Watts, Post, on recent visit. F. Hugh Herbert script, which his NY colleagues underrated, has lightness, gaiety and considerable grace and charm in its writing...Holly Harris, subbing for two weeks for Vivienne Segal in Pal Joey, gives skillful dramatic and singing performances in the Rodgers and Hart revival, comments Hobe, Variety. Betty O'Neil, who replaced Elaine Stritch, was praised for fine job, while critic still believes Harold Lang miscast in title role.

## New Theatre Action

League of NY Theatres committee of building experts will meet with officials of Fire and Building Departments of New York City, in light of National Production Authority dropping ban on building of new theatres, April 1, 1953. Open letters of the week included: Fire Commissioner Herwitz claim that any theatre owner could fireproof his building to allow smoking, producer John Golden and Broadway Association president Robert Christenberry blamed lack of good plays, not theatres. Howard Cullman clarified stand, explaining he wanted smoking between acts, not during performances.

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' Cumulative NYC Ratings '  
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D - Daily                      W - Weekly                      M - Monthly      B - Broadcast

DT - NY Times	DJC - Journal of Commerce	WCM - Chr.Science Meniter
DH - NY Herald Tribune	DWJ - Wall Street Journal	WC - Commonweal
DN - NY News	DWW - Women's Wear	WCU - Cue
DM - NY Mirror	WB - Billboard	WN - Nation
DC - NY Compass	WV - Variety	WNR - New Republic
DP - NY Pest	WCD - Critical Digest	WNS - Newsweek
DJ - NY Journal American	WGN - George Jean Nathan	WNY - New Yorker
DW - NY World Tele-Sun	WWM - Ward Merchouse	WSR - Saturday Review
DB - Breoklyn Eagle	BC - WCBS Bill Leonard	WT - Time
DL - L.I.Press	BL - New Leader - WEVD	MP - Park East

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them net if they think they will be hits. "Se-se" means the critic did net state directly if he recommends the shew fer an entertaining or stimulating evening.

THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	PROS: 19    Cen: DH DP WGM WWM BL WC WNY
	Nene: DWJ WN WNR WSR
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	PROS: 29    Cen: WN
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	PROS: 29    Cen: WN
THE MALE ANIMAL-4/30/52	PROS: 27    Nene: WGN MP WNR
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	PROS: 26    Cen: WCD WGN    Nene: WN MP
MRS. McTHING-2/20/52	PROS: 20    Cen: DM DJ BC BL WNR WT WGN    Nene: WNR MP
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	PROS: 25    Cen: BL    Nene: WNR
NEW FACES OF 1952-5/16/52	PROS: 25    Cen: DP WT WGN    Nene: WN WNR
A NIGHT IN VENICE-6/26/52	PROS: 20    Cen: DC WSR    Nene: WGN WNR BC WT MP
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	PROS: 25    Cen: DW BL WN WNR WT
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	PROS: 29    Cen: WT
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	PROS: 23    Cen: DP DJ BL    Nene: WCM WN WNR WSR
WISH YOU WERE HERE-6/25/52	PROS: DN DC DB DL DJC WV BL
	NONE: DWW WCD WGN BC WCM WN WNR MP
	CON: DT DH DM DP DJ DW DWJ WB WWM WC WCU WNS WNY
	WSR WT

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' Off Broadway '  
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American Lyric Theatre repertory season of one act musicals, plays and ballets at Provincetown extended through September...Amate Opera Theatre reopens September 12 presenting free performances week ends...Love in our Time, continues at Originals Only Wednesday through Sundays..."Theodere, Knight of Evil" now in 11th month of one man midnight Saturday shews at Circle in Square...Fortress of Glass starts two week engagement at Circle in Square September 2nd...Journeymen, newspapermen's play group seeking original scripts, Send to Bill Jordan, 66 Bank Street. Originals Only also seeking new scripts...Masque and Lyre performances of Iolanthe included impersonations of Messrs Gilbert and Sullivan as members of the ensemble.

Summer and Sneke production at Circle in Square de a curious bit of spell binding of the Tennessee Williams' play that the uptown professional cast was net capable of, praises Pelleck, Compass...Living Theatre twin bill panned by Rice, Pest, who felt summer madness had gone too far. Curtain raiser The Heroes was gem compared to incomprehensible Ubi the King.

NY City Department of Parks annual Marionette Theatre productions introduce many youngsters to theatre, Herald Tribune news story points out, Group headed by Dorothy Fisher has been putting on plays in parks since 1939.

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' Green Room Department '  
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SHAW RIGHT AGAIN...Failure of public to visit and support George Bernard Shaw's home at Ayet.St.Lawrence proves that cynical old sage was right about his fellow man again, sighs Herald Tribune editorial. Looking down or up, as the case may be, GBS undoubtedly would say he expected such treatment all along. Posterity may yet catch up with GBS.

PRODUCTION IDEAS...Most theatre fans go to theatre to have emotions stirred, and they can't always be stirred with slapstick, reminds George Jean Nathan...If Arthur Miller wants to fight congressional witch hunts, why doesn't he write a good play about Senator McCarthy, suggests Chapman, News...New Faces of 1952 success may herald return of mere good intimate revues, hopes Burr, Playbill.

MAIL BOX...Since 1925 Schaffner Players have been touring in tent show productions of original plays, Neil Schaffner, Wapello, Iowa, informs News' drama desk. Playing a different show each night in each new town, current titles include How Funny Are People, Too Bashful for Betty, and In Bed with Grandpa. Audiences average 1000.

COLUMN TIPS..."Art" movie houses, not TV, to blame for stealing legit theatre customers, hears Killigan...Another reason for lack of NY theatre business, notes Walker, is that many Broadway playgoers are abroad this summer...Winchell wonders if Jose Ferrer decision to stay away from NY for 18 months has anything to do with taxes.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Show business now convinced that large conventions don't draw business for theatre, Sylvester, News, reports, because visitors are too busy with their own activities...National theatre cannot be successful in a democracy insists Coleman, Mirror. If ANTA wants to survive it must rely on the people, not the government, for support. Board members must be elected through representative democratic processes.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES...Modern theatre handicapped by fact that world itself is so interesting and dramatic that it is dangerous rival of the theatre, and by fact that most great plays of past were based on moral values that cynical and sophisticated civilization of today scorn, Cedric Hardwicke told Watts, Pest... Los Angeles critics panning of eastern musicals show their ignorance of theatre and their chips on their shoulders, Galina Talva, Call Me Madam, wrote Merehouse, WT&S...Jean Crawford isn't afraid of a live audience, Sylvester, News, learned the hard way.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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Barnes, former Herald Tribune critic, to write monthly piece for "Theatre Arts" Janet Riley replaced Maggie McNamara, The Moon is Blue...Cleris Leachman replaces Martha Wright, South Pacific for two weeks, while Wright subs for Janet Blair in Chicago company...Dorothy Franklin replaces Irene Berdoni, South Pacific...ANTA to run first Tuesday of month theatre forums, including one entitled, "Are the critics undermining the theatre"...Dr. C.Robert Kase, University of Delaware, making nationwide tour for ANTA to seek how group can best aid regional theatre...William Warfield and Leontyne Price, who held title roles in Porgy and Bess, married... Dave Steinberg will rebuild his scene building studio in Fort Lee, NJ.

Vacation Players is a summer puppet theatre unit run by nine to 13 year olds in Brooklyn, Knittle, Times, reports. Production of Peter Pan is planned during fall at public schools, after summer tours of city playgrounds.



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' Digests of Famous Hits - No, No, Nanette '  
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Most of the nation's large cities had seen the musical, the country had been humming the two top songs for ever a year, and a successful production had been staged in London before No, No, Nanette opened in New York September 16, 1925 at the Globe Theatre. Produced and directed by H.H. Frazee, the show stayed out of NY because the producer explained it simply wasn't ready for Broadway. With book by Otto Harbach and Frank Mandell, lyrics by Irving Caesar and Harbach and with music by Vincent Youmans, the musical adaptation of My Lady Friends farce played 321 performances in NY before starting its world-wide tours. A summer theatre favorite, it is being considered for Broadway revival by several producers. A London production new on a try-out tour, won a rave review when caught by Tynan, London Evening Standard at Gelders Green Theatre.

"Tea for Two" and "I Want to be Happy" tunes were familiar to first night critics and most noted that productions of them was pleasant, though slightly anti-climatic. Charles Winniger, long a stage and vaudeville favorite, walked off with top honors for his comedy role, while Louise Greedy was welcomed back to musical comedy. Georgia O'Ramey and Mary Lawler were featured and drew fine reviews.

Dale, American, sole daily reviewer who doubted if wait by patient New York theatregoers to see the musical was worth while. He personally had viewed the show the summer before in London. Critic still considered it a simple, light, frothy musical with a pair of tunes that had been heard so much he hated them. Scenery he considered unartistic and hideous. Evening Post critic thought script could stand some cutting, but otherwise he found show delightful.

Success of show explained by Herald Tribune critic as proof of fact that public wants pretty tunes, clean, broad fun and a thoroughly draped chorus. This recipe, he predicted, could be used by any producer seeking a musical with universal appeal. Times man hailed it as a "highly meritorious paradigm" of its kind.

News critic was positive Youmans was best musical comedy composer in town, for his tunes remained fresh. Rathbun, Sun, joined others who hailed Winniger as star of the evening. Dudley, Evening World, believed reason for show's success was that it had captured all kinds of comedy, plus two great song hits. Vreeland, Telegram, sure show worthy of all the praise it had won on the road. Gillette, Billboard, praised show and excellent cast, noting that chorus was especially attractive because they didn't mar their femininity by adapting male haircuts.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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A Night in Venice run at Jones Beach Marine Stadium extended until September 6... Actors Equity and League of NY Theatres new contract signed with minimum salary set for \$85 in NY and \$110 on the road... Empire Theatre, built in 1893, will be torn down in June 1953... Transportation Displays, Inc. advertising representatives for a number of railroads, hopes to get lower fares and distribution of mail order blanks, on commuter show trains... New Haven Railroad starts fourth year of "Show Trains" September 19 with New Faces of 1952.

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